

Plum Creek Testimony
Montana State Legislature, Helena, MT, January 9, 2007
Education Appropriations Subcommittee

Topic:

To support the Montana Natural Heritage Program's state budget request to improve the state's natural resource databases.

Presented by:

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Testimony:

For the record, my name is Henning Stabins. I am employed by Plum Creek Timber Company as a Wildlife Biologist and am located in Columbia Falls, Montana.

Plum Creek is the largest owner of timberland in the U.S., with over 8 million acres of forest land in 18 states.

- Plum Creek has a long history of environmental stewardship and major economic impact in Montana.
- We have a strong manufacturing business in Montana that employs 1,450 people.
- In Montana, we manage 1.3 million acres of forest land which is about 15% of our Company holdings.

The Natural Resource Information System and the Montana Natural Heritage Program provide a valuable repository of a wide variety of natural resource information routinely used by Plum Creek.

The Montana Natural Heritage Program (NHP) is a great partner in the environmental stewardship of Montana's lands – both public and privately held. The NHP is an important asset in achieving science-based solutions to many issues impacting Montana's natural resources.

For example, we use data on the state's biological resources that are collected, compiled, and distributed by the NHP to assist our forest management personnel in making decisions that include on-the-ground conservation and protection measures for a variety of species from slugs and snails all the way up to bald eagles and grizzly bears.

This data is critical to our early planning processes and environmental reviews so that we can avoid conflicts and impacts to these resources and our operations. With this information, we are better able to properly implement management practices for sustainable forestry based on the best science and data available.

Our lands are third-party certified to an international sustainable forestry standard. During our recent 2006 Montana audit, Plum Creek's consistent history of participation and application of cooperative approaches to biodiversity conservation was recognized. The cooperative work with the NHP is an integral part of this history.

But the partnership goes both ways - we provide the NHP with biological data collected by our science teams on items such as rare species to improve our collective knowledge and management of these biological issues. Recent documentation I provided to the NHP was part of a re-evaluation and downgrading of a globally-imperiled species. This allows conservation efforts by all landowners to be directed efficiently to those species most in need of attention. In this way, the NHP data helps to facilitate proactive efforts to avoid federal threatened and endangered species listings, and eliminate the need for a costly regulatory process.

In addition to data sharing, Plum Creek has partnered with the NHP, funding joint projects such as the acquisition of remote-sensing data for wetland mapping across the state.

Finally, as another example of our use of the data and expertise of the NHP, I developed a brochure on the rare, threatened, and endangered species and forest communities in NW Montana to be used as a tool to broaden the practice of sustainable forestry in our state. Plum Creek distributed this educational brochure to over 500 small private forest landowners and loggers. NHP data and staff review made this project a success.

In summary, the NHP and NRIS provide valuable services to Montana citizens, businesses, and landowners. In particular, the information compiled and distributed by the NHP positively impacts the management of Montana's fish and wildlife resources. Plum Creek supports the additional funding for the NHP to improve the state's biological resource information.